

PRESS RELEASE



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SPECIAL CHRISTMAS EXHIBITION

The Museum extends a warm invitation for the holiday season. When Angels Bent Near the Earth to Touch Their Harps of Gold: The Christmas Story marks the first time in recent years that the Museum has celebrated the holidays with a special exhibition. Dr. Patrick de Winter, the Museum's curator of early Western art, has chosen approximately 60 works, drawn primarily from the Museum's Medieval and Renaissance collections and also including several loans from Ohio collectors. The paintings, manuscript illuminations, sculptures, and decorative objects will be on view from December 1 through January 17.

Arranged in narrative fashion, the works capture the charm of the Christmas story. Playing the lute to celebrate the joyful event, a sixteenth-century Austrian angel, with mantel and wings unfurled, introduces the exhibition. Images of Christ's ancestors and Old Testament prophets follow. Events from the early life of the Virgin are represented, succeeded by the nativity, the focal point of the exhibition. A twelfth-century ivory from South Italy depicts with tender emotion the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. This and other works convey both the human intimacy and the message of redemption which the birth of Christ held for medieval men and women. The adoration of the gift-bearing Magi and the joyful wonder of the lowly shepherds are other well represented events of the Christmas cycle, which concludes with the Flight into Egypt.

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Within these thematic groupings, the works draw on a wide range of media. In addition to paintings and prints, the exhibition includes reliefs and sculptures modeled in wood, terra cotta, bronze, ivory, and marble; skillful examples of tapestry, silk weaving, and embroidery; objects crafted in enamel, silver, and gold; and the miniature works of manuscript illuminators.

A number of works illustrate details from the apocrypha, pious legends which over the centuries embellished the narrative of the Gospels. A date tree, for example, which gently bends its branches so that the Holy Family might more readily pick its fruits on their Flight into Egypt, is represented in The Hours of Charles the Noble, a manuscript illuminated in the refined style of early fifteenth-century Paris. Such charming details convey the human and the wondrous aspects of the Christmas story.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.